

Message Text

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ACTION AID-59

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NAIROBI FOR REDSO/EA

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAID, RW

SUBJECT: TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR MRND

1. FOLLOWING IS PREPOSTEROUS REQUEST FROM SECGEN HABIMANA OF NATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT FOR DEVELOPMENT (MRND) WHICH, JUST AS PREPOSTEROUSLY, I BELIEVE DESERVES OUR SERIOUS CONSIDERATION.

2. REQUEST (SO FAR ONLY MADE ORALLY) IS VERY SIMPLE: HABIMANA WOULD LIKE ONE OR TWO AMERICAN "TECHNICIANS" TO HELP STAFF MRND AND HELP PLAN ITS DEVELOPMENTAL ACTIVITIES, NOTABLY UMUGANDA.

3. BACKGROUND: MRND IS CREATURE OF PRESIDENT HAYBARIMANA, ESTABLISHED IN 1975 AS MECHANISM FOR MOBILIZING ALL RWANDANS IN NATIONAL BOOTSTRAPS EFFORT AT DEVELOPMENT. ALTHOUGH TO OUTSIDER IT MAY LOOK LIKE EVERY-BODY ELSE'S UNITARY POLITICAL PARTY, MRND CHARTER EXPLICITLY DISAVOWS POLITICAL ROLE OR PARTY STATUS IN FAVOR OF NATIONAL UNITY AND ECONOMIC PROGRESS. VERTICALLY ORGANIZED, MRND

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REACHES DOWNWARD TO GRASSROOTS OSTENSIBLY TO ENGAGE EVERY RWANDAN IN DEVELOPMENTAL DECISION-MAKING AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION. ALL RWANDANS ARE MEMBERS, BUT TRUE MILITANTS CAN BE IDENTIFIED BY MRND BUTTONS WITH IMAGE OF HABYARIMANA.

4. FOREGROUND: TRUTH IS, MRND IS MOSTLY PAPER ORGANIZA-

TION, AND MOST OF ITS OFFICIALS ARE CIVIL AUTHORITIES WEARING DIFFERENT HATS. ALTHOUGH PRETENDING TO DECIDE DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND OVERSEE IMPLEMENTATION NATIONWIDE, MRND'S MAJOR ACTIVITY CONSISTS OF ORGANIZING UMUGANDA, ONCE--WEEK MANUAL LABOR EXERCISE IN WHICH ALL RWANDANS-- FROM PRESIDENT AND CABINET ON DOWN -- ARE MORE OR LESS OBLIGED TO PARTICIPATE. IN FACT, UMUGANDA HAS QUITE A FEW ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO ITS CREDIT (ROADS, COFFEE PLANTATIONS, FISH PONDS, SCHOOLS, ETC.) NOT LEAST OF WHICH IS SOILING HANDS OF BUREAUCRATS AND GETTING THEM IN TOUCH WITH REALITIES OF UNDERDEVELOPMENT. BUT MUCH UMUGANDA IS BADLY CONCEIVED, POORLY ORGANIZED MAKE-WORK, WHICH EVEN "MILITANTS" RESENT AS WASTE OF THEIR TIME AND ENERGIES.

5. PROPOSED US ROLE: ON MORE THAN ONE OCCASION, SECGEN HABIMANA HAS ACKNOWLEDGED TO ME UMUGANDA'S UNPOPULARITY AND CONCEDED THAT HE LACKS MEANS TO ORGANIZE AND RATIONALIZE THIS GREAT WEEKLY OUTPOURING OF EFFORT. HE AND WE KNOW OF A GREAT MANY UMUGANDA SUCCESS STORIES (NOT A FEW RELATED TO EMBASSY SELF-HELP ACTIVITIES), BUT IN ALMOST EVERY CASE THEY ARE RESULT OF EXCEPTIONALLY DYNAMIC LOCAL LEADERSHIP. NEVERTHELESS, GOR FIVE-YEAR DEVELOPMENT PLAN COUNTS HEAVILY ON UMUGANDA FOR MANUAL LABOR INPUT -- FOR BUILDING RURAL SCHOOLS, ACCESS ROADS, NUTRITIONAL CENTERS, RURAL HEALTH FACILITIES. INDEED, WITH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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GOR ASSENT, AID HAS PROGRAMMED UMUGANDA LABOR INTO SEVERAL OF ITS OWN UPCOMING DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS. IF THESE INPUTS ARE TO MATERIALIZE, MUCH MORE SYSTEMATIC PLANNING AND ORGANIZING WILL BE REQUIRED AT THE TOP -- AND IT IS FOR THIS THAT US HELP IS ASKED.

6. DISCUSSION: IF MRND WERE IN FACT AN EFFECTIVE POLITICAL INSTRUMENT, I WOULD NOT EVEN ENTERTAIN SUCH A REQUEST (NOR, MOST LIKELY, WOULD REQUEST HAVE BEEN MADE). BUT UP TO THIS POINT, AT LEAST, MRND APPEARS TO BE NOTHING MORE THAN IT PRETENDS: A SOMETIMES CLUMSY BUT GENERALLY BENIGN ATTEMPT AT RALLYING RWANDANS IN BEHALF OF THEIR OWN ECONOMIC SELF-IMPROVEMENT. ALTHOUGH MANY CHAFE AT SOCIAL PRESSURES TO TAKE PART IN UMUGANDA, I KNOW OF NO CONCRETE INSTANCES OF ABUSE OR EXTORTION, NO MRND "THUGS" ROAMING ABOUT. IT'S LESS IDEOLOGICAL THAN UJAMAA, LESS TRANS-PARENTLY MANIPULATIVE THAN SALONGO, AND MORE DEEPLY ROOTED IN TRADITION THAN EITHER ONE. PROPERLY ORGANIZED, ITS "SELF-HELP" DEVELOPMENT CONTRIBUTION COULD BE GREAT.

7. NORTH KOREANS AND CHINESE HAVE GIVEN MRND ITS DUE: VEHICLES, EQUIPMENT, THOSE BUTTONS, EXCHANGE VISITS, AND

SOME CADRE TRAINING. BUT HABIMANA PROFESSES NOT TO BE KEEN ON THIS ("PEOPLE CALL US COMMUNISTS AND THAT'S NOT TRUE"), AND HE WOULD OBVIOUSLY LIKE TO BE ABLE TO POINT TO US SUPPORT FOR MRND EFFORTS.

8. ACTION REQUESTED: BELIEVE WE SHOULD NOT RPT NOT DISMISS HABIMANA REQUEST OUT OF HAND, IRREGULAR AS IT IS. MRND IS CLOSE OF HEARTS OF PEOPLE IN POWER HERE AND IT IS WELL-INTENTIONED. GESTURE ON OUR PART COULD BOTH GARNER GOODWILL AND HELP RATIONALIZE RWANDANS' EFFORTS TO HELP THEMSELVES. IS THERE CONCEIVABLY A SOURCE ON WHICH WE MIGHT DRAW TO PROVIDE TECHNICAL HELP TO MRND; AN ECONOMIC PLANNER FOR EXAMPLE? ARE THERE PRIVATE AGENCIES IN US WHICH MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN PROVIDING SUCH LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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HELP, WITH PROSPECT OF EXERCISING SIGNIFICANT INFLUENCE ON RWANDAN DEVELOPMENT DIRECTIONS? WOULD APPRECIATE YOUR IDEAS/REACTIONS.
CRIGLER

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